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ABSTRACT

The literature review examines issues of child abuse and neglect, attempts to define child abuse, and gives information on: incidence figures; symptoms of abuse; characteristics of the abused and their families; knowledge level of educators; and the role of the schools in preventing, detecting, and reporting abuse or neglect. Teachers often do not know the signs of abuse or the legal requirements for reporting it. The document concludes that teachers need to be provided with appropriate training in this area; they need an efficient, delineated referral process for reporting abuse and neglect discovered by school personnel; individual teachers need to take responsibility by such actions as obtaining witnesses and keeping records; the schools need to assist families in the development of better parenting skills; and students need to know how they can avoid sexual abuse. (DB)

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Child Abuse and the Educator: A Review of Literature

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The physical, emotional, and sexual mistreatment and neglect of children has become a social ill of massive proportion. Those concerned with the welfare of our youth must respond to this crisis in an effective and organized manner. This manuscript is intended to review definitions, incidence figures, symptoms of abuse, characteristics of the abused and their families, knowledge possessed by educators and the role of the schools in the prevention, detection, and reporting of abuse or neglect. These aspects will be addressed in separate sections of this paper.

#### DEFINITION

It is difficult to define child abuse and neglect. No standard definition exists at present. Each state has it's own definition(s). Their main concern is the establishment of procedures for reporting the gathering of incidence figures and the defining of jurisdiction. Various agencies also develop their own definitions to operationalize the reporting and acceptance of cases.

These definitions, in effect, place limitations on parenting. Although parents have the right to rear their children according to cultural, religious, and personal beliefs, society must intervene if the children who are dependent on their parents for survival and socialization are harmed or threatened with harm. Indicators of harm or potential harm are outlined in the various state laws in order to operationalize their definitions.

Because of the variety of definitions, and the subjective interpretation of them by enforcement or intervention

professionals, many grey areas exist. Families often enter and leave these grey areas, making professional decisions difficult. What is obvious non-accidental injury, neglect, sexual molestation or mental injury to one person is not obvious to another. Additionally, it is difficult for an agency to decide whether to implement legal intervention procedures after a single isolated incident, or wait for the establishment of a pattern of abuse or neglect.

Conceptually, Broadhurst (1979) defines an abused or neglected youth as "a child whose physical or mental health or welfare is harmed or threatened with harm by the acts or omissions of his parent or other person responsible for his welfare."

#### INCIDENCE

Recent reports regarding incidence figures present a staggering picture. Each new report seems to raise the estimates of physical, sexual and emotional maltreatment of youth. Additionally, each new incidence figure is reported to be a "conservative" estimate.

The first national survey (Gil, 1970) estimated that 6000 children were abused in 1967. By 1973, this figure was revised to 60,000, a ten-fold increase (Kempe, 1973). In another study, it was reported that 500,000 children and youth were victims of abuse (Light, 1973). A more recent estimate indicated that each year 1.4 to 1.9 million students are abused by their parents or guardians (Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980). Yet because this estimate only included children between 3 and 17 years of age, and

most cases of child abuse involve children less than four years of age (Solomon, 1973), this estimate is probably less than actual figures. The most recent information to date shows that 1,712,641 reports were filed across the United States in 1984 (American Humane Society, personal communication, 1986). It is estimated that over half of all abuse and neglect cases involve children of school age (U.S. Department of Health Education and Welfare, 1979), one fourth of whom are attending secondary school (Laurie, 1977).

Perhaps as Bourne (1981) states, the increases are due to new laws and increased public recognition of the problem. However, Hoffman (1981) asserts that "the problems of definition and unreported cases again make it difficult to determine whether we are becoming more or less a nation of child abusers" (p. 174). Certainly, incidence figures vary considerably. This is due to official report figures based upon a lack of data from many states and regions, varying definitions of abuse and neglect, and an underreporting of cases.

According to Park & Collmer (1975) there are five reasons why mistreatment is not reported: (a) parents may not seek medical care for their children, (b) parents often take their children to different medical facilities each time they abuse to prevent detection of their pattern of abusive behavior, (c) some injuries may escape detection, (d) professionals may not report suspected cases, and (e) public health personnel may have varying interpretations of applicable abuse laws. Even the number of

deaths due to abuse is not known. Gelles (1982) reports estimates of two to five thousand yearly, but these estimates are also believed to be inaccurate due to many of the deaths being attributed to accidental or natural causes. Rose (1980) states that child abuse accounts for more deaths in young children than any one disease.

Fraser (1979) suggests that if all abuse cases were reported and agencies dealing with this problem operated at present capacities, only one-third of cases could be addressed. Whatever the figures, one conclusion stands clear; comprehensive, accurate data collection and documentation does not exist at present. Although all states have a mandatory reporting clause in their laws, each state's law differs in definition and procedures for reporting, investigation and intervention.

#### CHARACTERISTICS

##### Abusive Families

A number of characteristics, traits, and circumstances have been associated to those who abuse. They are:

- married and living with a spouse (Solomen, 1973)
- 30 to 60 percent abused as children (Johnson & Shovers, 1985)
- males more likely to abuse (Johnson & Shovers, 1985)
- females more likely to inflict serious injury (Johnson & Shovers, 1985)
- median age of 25 years (Johnson & Shovers, 1985)

- most believe physical punishment and slapping a spouse are appropriate behaviors (Straus, 1980)
- under great family stress (Straus, 1980)
- place unrealistic demands on child (Steele & Pollock, 1968)
- deal with their children as if they were adults (Steele & Pollock, 1968)
- premarital and unwanted pregnancies (Solomon, 1973)
- youthful marriages (Solomon, 1973)
- marital problems (Solomon, 1973)
- financial difficulties (Solomon, 1973)
- social isolation (Young, 1964)
- unemployment (Spinetta & Rigler, 1972)
- high mobility (Spinetta & Rigler, 1972)

#### Abused Children

The following characteristics have been associated with abused children:

- typically male under age 4 (Johnson & Shovers, 1985)
- prematurity, dysmaturity or low birth weight (Nesbit & Karagianis, 1982)
- high pitched or frequent crying (Nesbit & Karagianis, 1982)
- difficult temperament (Nesbit & Karagianis, 1982)
- poor or messy eating habits (Nesbit & Karagianis, 1982)
- unresponsiveness (Nesbit & Karagianis, 1982)
- sleeping problems (Nesbit & Karagianis, 1982)
- toileting problems (Nesbit & Karagianis, 1982)

- mental or physical handicaps (Nesbit & Karagianis, 1982)
- usually the only child in the family that is abused (Nesbit & Karagianis, 1982)

The reason why these characteristics effect the infliction of abuse (as explained by Zirpoli, 1986) are included in Appendix A.

#### SYMPTOMS OF ABUSE OR NEGLECT

The following are symptoms of abuse of neglect (McIntyre, 1982):

##### Physical Abuse

- unexplained bruises or welts, often clustered or forming regular patterns, in various stages of healing (indicating repeated abuse)
- unexplained burns suggestive of smoking materials, hot items (iron, stove burner), or immersion in hot liquids
- unexplained fractures, often to the facial area, or swollen and tender joints in limbs
- unexplained injuries in the abdominal area (tenderness, swelling, pain, vomiting)
- human bite marks, especially if they are adult in size, or appear often
- repeated injuries
- a child is truly fearful of parental discipline, fears adults, or is afraid to return home from school
- injuries reflective of instrument used (belt buckel, iron, rope or cord)

- injuries on several areas, indicating that the child was hit from many directions or that the child attempted a defense
- child tells of abusive behavior by parents to teacher or classmates

#### Neglect

- extremely unkept appearance, inappropriate clothing, poor hygiene
- extreme deviations from normal height and/or weight expectations
- constant hunger, begging or stealing food
- falls asleep in class, constant listlessness or fatigue
- untreated wounds or physical maladies
- repeated truancy
- odor of alcohol or marijuana of child's breath
- drug related side effects (lethargy or usually hyperactive behavior, dilated or constricted pupils)
- reports by the child indicating lack of care and supervision

#### Sexual Abuse

- pain upon walking or sitting
- stained, bloody, or torn underwear
- pain or itching in genital areas
- symptoms of venereal disease (itching or pain in genital area, extreme sensitivity to light, sores in genital or mouth area) in younger children

- pregnancy in early adolescence
- statements by child indicating advanced sexual knowledge for his/her age, or victimization through sexual assault

#### Other signs

- unwillingness to disrobe for gym, showers, of physical examinations
- behavioral or emotional disorders such as thumbsucking, extreme withdrawal or fear, phobias, compulsions, lags in emotional or intellectual development, or behavioral extremes
- conversations with parents in which they seem unconcerned about the child or view their child in a negative way

#### TEACHER KNOWLEDGE REGARDING ABUSE AND NEGLECT

Most teachers do not believe that they have ever had an abused or neglected student in their classes. Thirty-nine percent report having taught an abused or neglected student, 37% report having seen a child who was abused, and 24% have not, to their knowledge, either taught or seen an abused/neglected child. (McIntyre, In press). Levin (1983) found that 34% of teachers have reported a case of physical abuse, 21% have reported physical neglect, 8% have reported emotional neglect, and 5% have reported sexual abuse.

Although as one compares the two studies, it may initially appear as if those who have taught abused children made a report, the figures may be misleading as samples from the two studies were different, many teachers may have reported more than one case of

abuse, and it is not known how many teachers reported in more than one category. Additionally, teachers are probably not reporting all cases of abuse which occur in school age children. This may be due to two reasons. First, teachers as a group are not very aware of the signs and symptoms of child abuse, and second, many would not report certain cases.

In support of the first point, Levin (1973) found that on a 1 to 5 scale with 1 being "very knowledgeable", mean ratings for her 285 teachers were 2.5 for physical abuse, 2.6 for physical neglect, 3.1 for emotional abuse, 3.2 for emotional neglect, and 4.2 for sexual abuse. In addition McIntyre (In press) found that when a random sampling of 440 teachers was queried as to the ability to detect signs of physical abuse, 21% reported being "very aware" of these signs, 64% would recognize the signs if they were "very obvious", and 12% said that they were not aware of these indicators. Teachers were less aware of the signs of sexual abuse with 4% indicating that they were very aware of the signs, 17% reporting being aware of symptoms if they were very obvious, and 75% revealing that they would not recognize signs if they were present. Teachers were more aware of the signs of emotional abuse with responses indicating the 19% were very aware of symptoms, 52% would be able to recognize symptoms if they were very obvious, and 28% would be unable to recognize these signs. Teacher's awareness level was greater for the symptoms of neglect with 30% being very aware, 55% reporting being able to recognize symptoms if they were very evident, and 15% being unable to recognize those signs at all.

In support of the second point, McIntyre (In press) found that when teachers were asked if they would submit a report of suspected abuse when signs were evident, but parents denied it and the principal wished to avoid reporting, only 22% indicated that they would report as required by law. Forty six percent reported that they probably would, but 28% said that they probably would not and 2% indicated that they definitely would not. This result occurred even though 83% reported knowing of the existence of the State law. Perhaps the findings above explain why, when all states have mandatory reporting laws and over one-half of all abused children are of school age, only 8% (Broadhurst, 1978) to 10% of filed reports come from school personnel (National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect, 1982).

Another factor which might contribute to the low rate of reporting may be a lack of knowledge regarding legal requirements contained in state laws. Coutinho (1979) found that among a group of graduate students seeking master's degrees in special education, 59% were unclear or unaware of their responsibilities (three-fourths had previous teaching experience). In support of this, McIntyre (In press) found only 1/3 of teachers reporting being fully aware of their required behavior by state law. Interestingly, 43% reported being aware of their requirements under national law, even though a national law does not exist. Certainly, however, teachers feel that abuse is a area of concern. When teachers were asked if child abuse was a major issue which deserved their attention, sixty-one percent of teachers indicated

that it was very important, 37% though that it was important to some degree, and 2% believed that it was not of importance. Males were significantly more concerned about this issue than were females. (McIntyre, In press).

Similarly, Levin (1983) found a total of 69.6% of the teachers indicating "strongly agree" and another 26.9% checking "agree" to the item "I feel I am morally obligated to report suspected abuse." Similarly, 67.7% responded "strongly agree" and 28% indicated "agree" to the item "I feel I have a personal responsibility to report suspected abuse." Only 4.3% marked "agree" or "strongly agree" to the item "I feel it is not my place to become involved in whether or not a child has been abused". Only 6.7% indicated "agree" or "strongly agree" to the item "I think I may be physically harmed by angry parents if I report suspected abuse", and only 19.1% responded "agree" or "strongly agree" to the item "I think I may be harassed if I report suspected abuse."

It would appear then, that teachers are empathetic to the needs of abused or neglected children and wish to help, but their knowledge base which would allow for accurate identification and increased reporting is lacking in certain areas. Indeed, Volpe (1981) found through knowledge base testing, that among teachers, nurses, and social workers, educators were the group least informed and least prepared to deal with the problem of child abuse.

## THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL (CONCLUSIONS)

### Training of Teachers

Apparently, teachers are in need of instruction in the area of abuse and neglect. As mentioned previously, teachers as a group, tend to be uninformed as to the signs and symptoms of abuse and neglect. Additionally, their awareness of legal requirements is at a low level. This is probably due to lack of training. Over 80% of teachers received no child abuse information during their college career, while 66% have not received information on abuse/neglect during inservice training sessions (McIntyre, In press).

It does appear that exposure to information on child abuse and neglect through either college training or inservice sessions has a beneficial effect. Those who reported being very aware of the signs of physical, sexual, or emotional abuse or neglect had significantly more exposure to preservice training in abuse and neglect than those who were less aware or unaware. The same held true with respect to inservice training (McIntyre, In press). This supports the work of Volpe (1981) who found that teachers who participated in workshops on abuse showed a significant increase in both knowledge and confidence.

It is recommended that workshops include a unit on signs of abuse. For example, the abusive injuries most likely to be seen are bruises, welts, scars, burns, abrasions and fractured bones (Johnson & Showers, 1985). While it is common for children to

have bruises, cuts and abrasions on their knees, shins, elbows and foreheads, injuries to the back, hips, thighs, buttocks, genitals, back of legs, or face should make one suspicious (Zirpoli, 1986). Educators should also scrutinize excuses, and be suspicious of frequent or multiple injuries.

A unit on legal requirements should be included. This unit should cover proper documentation, mandatory reporting, immunity from prosecution if reports are made in good faith, and report submission to designated persons or agencies.

Other areas of instruction might include: definitions, incidence figures, characteristics of parent and child, intervention agencies and procedures, and self analysis of beliefs. The last aspect might be important as many educators may have difficulty differentiating between appropriate and inappropriate parental discipline. Detection and subsequent reporting of child abuse involves distinguishing normal parental discipline from parental excesses. While over half of 232 principals reported their use of physical punishment with special education students (Rose, cited in Parke and Collmer, 1975), three-fourths of teachers believed that corporal punishment was not used in their school (Levin, 1983). One-half (Levin, 1983) to two-thirds (Viano, cited in Parke and Collmer, 1975) of professional educators support spanking as a school discipline policy.

Over three-fourths of the respondents (77.5%) indicated that their parents had used corporal punishment to discipline them and

four-fifths (80.3%) of those responding did not feel corporal punishment is abuse (Levin, 1983). In the Levin study there was a significant relationship between "parents' use of corporal punishment" and "parents' right to discipline their children as they see fit, including the use of corporal punishment." If their parents used corporal punishment, then respondents were more likely to agree to a parents' right to discipline by corporal punishment. Legally, the Supreme Court supported the use of spanking as a disciplinary measure in Ingraham v. Wright (1977). Fourteen year-old James Ingraham was spanked with a two-foot paddle by three school personnel. The high court ruled that children are not protected by the Eighth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution forbidding the use of cruel and unusual punishment.

Clearly there is a need for programs to train school based personnel to deal with the problems of child abuse (Volpe, 1981). The National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect, sponsored by the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, (now entitled U.S. Department of Health and Human Services) has developed a curriculum entitled "We Can Help" to meet this need. Demonstration projects, which used this curriculum, have reported successful results (Higgs, 1977; Hughes & Hughes, 1977; and O'Bryan, 1977).

#### REFERRAL PROCEDURES

An efficient, delineated referral process for reporting abuse and neglect discovered by school personnel should be in effect in

all academic settings. Realistically, however, this is not the case. Only 25% of schools have reporting policies (Schmitt, 1975; Fox, 1977). Due to a variety of reasons, school board officials and school administrators may knowingly avoid the abuse and neglect issue. They may see it as being peripheral to their major concern of academics, another responsibility on an already overburdened staff, more red tape, or may perhaps feel apprehension at the possibility of parental reaction to a maltreatment accusation. Teachers may dread the possibility of hostile parental response, fear a break in the student-teacher relationship, dismay at the thought of worsening the home situation, or become discouraged by supervisory inaction. Indeed in support of this, 37% of teachers in one study felt that the child would suffer more abuse if a report of suspected abuse was made, and only 50% of teachers found administrative procedures to be adequate (Levin, 1983).

To demonstrate the effectiveness of a well organized referral process, Jefferson County, Colorado set up a child protection team of which schools were a part. After one year, the number of abuse reports jumped from 10 to 387 cases. Even if schools are not involved in inter-agency cooperative efforts, they can make a difference by themselves. Although procedures vary from one school system to another, optionally a delineated sequence of steps leading to a report to a state office should be outlined and implemented. However, if no procedure is in effect or the

administration bulks at reporting, the teacher is still legally obligated to circumvent the system and make a report. If this is not done, the teacher is liable for prosecution and loss of license to teach. Therefore, the teacher should:

a. Obtain other witnesses.

Preferably, the child should be seen by the school nurse and a record of the observed symptoms or injuries should be entered into his/her file. If a school nurse is unavailable, a guidance counselor, administrator, or fellow teacher should view the suspected signs of mistreatment.

b. Keep a personal record.

A running anecdotal recording of observations should be kept for future reference. Notes should be objective, with personal thoughts identified as such.

c. Report the incident.

If your school does not have a procedure for reporting, the local telephone number for reporting incidents of suspected abuse and neglect can be obtained by dialing "operator" and requesting the child abuse and neglect reporting line. Reports can be made anonymously if desired.

d. Follow up.

In addition to the above suggestions, the teacher may wish to submit a written report to the local social service agency concerned with child abuse and neglect.

Depending on the situation, the teacher may also decide to inform the parents of the action taken. The teacher might also wish to discuss the situation with the child in order to facilitate an understanding of what has transpired. If the report of maltreatment was not made anonymously, the teacher should remain in contact with the person assigned to the child's case by the agency in charge of child abuse and neglect. This allows for continuous feedback and coordination of strategies between professionals (McIntyre, 1982).

#### ASSISTING THE FAMILY

Where former generations of parents could turn to the extended family for training in child rearing, support and respite, today's mobile society often leaves parents isolated from this major support group. Today's parents must place greater reliance on societal institutions. The school has been identified as one of the community support systems which must provide an enlarged role (Coutinho, 1979). Unfortunately, current child abuse intervention procedures are even less systematic than reporting procedures (Zirpoli, unpublished manuscript). Child abuse is typically viewed by authorities as the result of a family crisis which will improve short-term intervention (Faller, 1985). Many school systems are meeting the need however.

Abusive parents in one demonstration project (Lutzker, Megson, Webb, & Dachman, 1985) were trained to interact more

appropriately with their children. Parents viewed videotaped sequences of proper adult-child interaction, engaged in role play, and received feedback from trainers. Increased skill was shown in making clear and concise verbal statements, avoiding scolding, and initiating affection and physical contact, among other skills. The researchers emphasized the importance of providing appropriate role models, thus educators are an important link as they demonstrate interaction skills to children who will become future parents. It is also important that teachers, when they interact with parents, give positive feedback regarding the child. Besides modeling a positive skill (complimenting), parents may view new aspects of their child's personhood. This is especially important in special education situations. Children with handicaps are more likely to be abused (Zirpoli, unpublished manuscript) and tend to be abused for a longer period of time through their childhood years (Glaser & Bentouim, 1979). Perhaps friends and relatives, due to insecurity and not knowing how to react, withdraw from the parents, allowing support systems to deteriorate (Zirpoli, unpublished manuscript).

In a second demonstration project (Wolfe and Sandler 1981), abusive parents were taught effective behavior management skills through reading, role playing, problem solving and feedback. These skills were still being used effectively one year later.

These programs demonstrate that abusive adults can be helped to develop better parenting skills. School can play a part in

this improvement by reporting abuse which will identify abusive parents, providing meeting space for programs to be conducted, starting or supporting these projects through joint administrative/union cooperation and providing appropriate role modeling through our contacts with parents. Extended school hours and after-school recreational programs also take some stress off of families (Broadhurst, 1979).

#### Assisting the Abused Child

Schools serve an important role in the prevention of abuse just by implementing reporting procedures, but schools are increasingly taking a pro-active role in prevention by educating students about abuse. For example, The New York State Department of Education has expanded the school's responsibility to include education on the avoidance of child sexual abuse. When children are informed and assertive, they are less likely to become victims of abuse. Schools are promoting this informed and assertive mindset through speakers, movies, posters and unit lessons. Many schools provide information and courses to secondary level students which are designed to make them better future parents. These include information on child development, consumerism, budgeting, parenting skills, stress management, nutrition, and family planning. Adolescent parents are a primary focus of these courses.

#### Summary

Schools play an important role in preventing, identifying, and remediating child abuse. Additionally, individual teachers, having more contact with children than professionals in other

service agencies play a major role in the detection of abuse and neglect. They are in a position to set into motion a program to curb this abusive and neglectful behavior. Involvement by educators is important for numerous reasons: legislation mandates it, professionalism demands it and human compassion for another subjected to cruelty and pain morally commits us.

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